

March 19, 2015

To Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and the Education Committee:

Testimony for "An Act Concerning Early Childhood Educators and Initiatives"

My name is Edie Reichard. I am the director of a State Funded Child Development Center in Hamden. I have been the director since 2004. In 1986, I earned a bachelor's degree in Communication Disorders with a focus in early childhood from the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire. I moved to Connecticut soon after I graduated and worked as a Speech/Language Assistant with special needs children. In 1994 I became very interested in Early Childhood Education and became a preschool teacher. I taught for 6 months when I was asked to become the director of the program as well as a full time teacher. I led the program to become NAEYC accredited in 1995 before CT was mandating accreditation by law. I worked very hard and received my Director's Credential in 2003.

If I were to be in the same situation now as many others are, by CT legislation, I would not be qualified to teach in the program in which I am the director. My degree is not from an approved university and it is from 1986. Thanks to the grandfathering language I can still do my job. However under current law our Board of Directors could not even consider hiring someone with my credentials and 20+ years experience.

The same holds true for hiring staff in our State Funded centers. Staff hired for my program have been very hard working dedicated individuals who have higher education degrees in Early Childhood Education or higher education degrees in related fields of study with credits in early childhood. Some of them have been with my program for over 30 years. Some of them are working full time while they pursue their degrees (mandated by state legislation). They have an honest love for their profession. They are not babysitters as some think. They are "teachers". As such we should be able to offer them a comparable wage to public school teachers. We are told that the early years are the most important years in a child's development and yet we pay those who chose this profession at a subpar level of compensation. Then we have the nerve to tell them that the degrees they have received in Early Childhood Education or a related field are not good enough for them to teach our children. We tell them this because their degrees are from non-approved colleges and are too old (some of these teaching colleges no longer exist). And then we have the added burden of telling them they must earn an ECTC on top of the degree they have already earned.

The state only has 14 approved ECTC colleges: nine of which are for Associate Degrees and 5 for Bachelor Degrees. This limits the pool of qualified teachers and hinders the already difficult task of hiring teachers with a BA.

State Funded Child Development Centers embrace high standards, teacher qualifications and all the components of a high quality system. We have shown this by meeting accreditation standards and maintaining accreditation.

We need you to review the current system for teacher approval and provide the flexibility needed that allow us to keep degreed teachers and assistants in our employ. We also need a streamlined approach to staff qualifications that opens up the pool of teachers rather than the current system which restricts the pool.

Please support HB 7020. Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

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